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ABSTRACT

Three different models for the teaching of African art are presented in this paper. A comparison of the differences between the approaches of Western art historians and African art historians informs the articulation of the three models--an approach for determining style, another for dealing with analysis, and a third for synthetic interpretation. (DB)

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AFRICAN ART TEACHING STRATEGIES

Jacqueline Chanda

"According to tenets of aesthetic education, the student is to develop competencies in the areas of art history, (aesthetics) and art criticism in addition to studio skills."(Hamblen,) What this statement implies is that teachers must become aware of how to teach all these competencies. Models for teaching studio skills are in abundance, for this has been the central focus of art education for years. Models for the teaching of art criticism have been formulated by a number of scholars, Feldman (1973), Mittler, (), Sisk (1976), Armstrong (1977), Hermine Feinstein (1989) and Johansen (1982). They all have some what similar approaches, the terminology may change slightly, from description to impression, or from valuing to judging, but the bases is the same. Some form of initial contact and response to the work of art through description, a visual analysis of the work, interpretation of works parts and relations, and judging its overall expression.

There have, however, only been a few attempts at formulating models for art history, perhaps because it has been felt that art criticism encomposes art historical tasks. In reality it is not possible to conduct the art history and art criticism inquiries totally independently of each other, but at any one time, any one teacher's main concern can lie in one direction rather than the other and for that purpose the teacher must understand the difference between the two approaches.

The development of an art history model is essential because the study of art history is reflected in art education frameworks. In many cases it is described as Understanding and appreciation of self and others through art cultures and hertiage. Notice that the description is

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understanding and appreciation of others through art cultures and heritage. This statement implies the necessity of including other cultures in art studies. One of the purposes of including multi-cultural materials is to give children an opportunity to expand their horizons, to become familiar with the "difference" and the "similarities" between peoples, and to understanding and tolerant those that are different from us. It is for that reason that my focus is on an "other" cultures, namely African cultures. Even though there is this desire to include multi-cultural materials in the curriculum, one can not study and look at different cultures in the same ways we perceive our own. The spontaneous interpretation of the students or teachers is founded, consciously or unconsciously, on patterns of behavior and attitudes proper to his own culture and are most often wrong. It is for this reason that a different model be formulated that is more appropriate for non-western cultures.

There are several other reasons for a non-western and more partiuclarly African art model; one, non-western art needs to be studied in conjunction with the cultural concepts that gave birth to the object. Two, in the context of non-western art, often the artist is unknown and the investigation involves a number of objects related by style or purpose or institution. Three, traditional models do not provide opportunities for the investigation into the numerous levels of meaning of African art.

It is perhaps for this reason that very little African art is included in the adopted curricula of most states. Discover Art makes reference to African art only once, in grade one, Spectra makes reference to African art only once in the sixth grade book, and even though art works has made an effort to include many non-western pieces, African art is only represented twice, once in the time line, and one in the visuals for grades 4-6.

BASES OF MODEL

The bases of the models we will see stem from an analysis of the Western art histroians approach, the African art historians approach and the information processing models for critical thinking skills. Just as the Western art history, the non-western art historian seeks to identify materials and techniques, place of creation, makers in terms of ethnic

groups, meaning and function within the society. However, the two use different methods. Because of the lack of chronology, the African art historian is not always able to find the place of an art object in the scheme of history. His main objective may be to place the object in its cultural and geographic location or to recreate the evolution and movement of a particular group of objects. That art history revolves around the function of the object and its symbolic character. African art history by obligation grew out of anthropology, sociology and archaeology, while western art history grow out of criticism, philosophy, and history.

THREE DIFFERENT MODEL: STYLE, ANALYSIS, SYNTHETIC INTERPRETATION

The African art historian is thus more concerned with stylistic characteristics or conventions for the identification or classification of objects by ethnic or regions (to determine where the piece came from). He analyses the subject matter and the context in which the piece is used to determine the possible function of the object. And he interprets the object as a symbol of its cultural and social context. Often in this case the object may be derived from some heroic, historic or cosomological myth. Because of these three levels of investigation, I have developed three different teaching models. One representing an approach to determining style, another for dealing with analysis and a third for synthetic interpretation.

The concept of style is indispensable for the study of art. Usually, style refers to the art of a particular historical period, but it may also mean the art of a nation (the Italian Renaissance), or region, or a group of artist. It can also designate an individual artist's quality. Style may refer to a technical or artistic approach (pointillism, photorealism). In the context of African art style or form refers to the art of an ethnic group connected with a particular institution. Style can tell us much about an artist's environment, values, and heritage. Indeed, archaeologists and anthropologists use style to reconstruct whole cultures: they put pieces of stylistic evidence together like a mosaic, trying to form a complete picture or ideas of a culture.

Analysis refers to the primary interpretation of subject matter or

images while synthetic interpretation refers to the study of deeper symbolic meaning. In using the terms analysis and synthetic interpreation, I have simplified Panofsky's wording, iconography and iconology. I have, however, taken the meanings as defined by Panofsky but have placed emphasises in different areas. For Panofsky the purpose of description of style is to determine primary meaning, the purpose of style identification in African is art is for classification only. Panofsky's iconography relates to the conventional meaning of the subject matter. In African art it deals with motifs and images that convey concepts and themes as they relate to function, not meaning. Icons and symbolic images do not necessary point to the meaning of the work of art. Where Panofsky's iconology refers to an interpretation arising from synthesis, in the context of African art, meaning can also be arrived at through synthesis but by synthesis of context of use and social structure. Consequently in African art one is more concerned with the context in which the object functions and how the art object may be a symbol in itself of social and cultural structure. Its meaning is multiplex. For example, the Chikunza mask (a mask made by the Chokwe peoples of Angola) carries with it various symbols inherent in the Chokwe culture. It is used in the Mukanda initiation ceremonies. The mask is said to represent an ancient king of the Chokwe people or an ancestral spirit favorable to fertility and to hunting and is the spiritual boss of the mukanda. He is the "father of mukanda", a rather stern father figure. He is said to instruct the novice in learning a specialist mystic circumcision dance. He is connected with nature and the spirits through the symbolism of certain icons present on the costume and mask and carried by the dancer during performances. The name of this mask is also indicative of it connection with nature spirits. **Chikunza** literally means grasshopper. This insect is known for it procreative powers. **Chikunza** in evoking this insect, symbolizes fertility. At the same time the long tapering conical headdress decorated with graduated rings is said to represent the horn of an antelope. The horn symbolizes power and virility. The decorative motifs on the **Chikunza** mask also have their connection with the Chokwe cosmogony. The circles represent the sun while the dots depict the stars.

Consequently, just as religion becomes a means of deciphering early Christian and Renaissance art so myth and cosmologie become a means of deciphering African art.

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ART HISTORY INQUIRY MODELS

INQUIRY MODEL FOR STYLE

(Based on an inductive model for information processing)

I. OBSERVATION:

The observation stage entails three types of analytical strategies, structural, descriptive, and formal.

Structural analysis:

The structural analysis is the same as a morphological analysis. It requires a careful observation of the parts of an object. The parts need to be studied in relation to themselves and in relation to the whole. At this stage the children will isolate basic aspect of the figural form, in the case of a sculpture it may be the shape of the head, legs, arms, torso, and feet. These part may be drawn or verbally described.
Question: What are the parts of this piece?

Descriptive analysis:

Once the parts have been isolated the children can proceed by putting them back together to form a whole. The description at this level deals with how the pieces are connected, i.e. arms attached to the sides, head attached to shoulders, etc. This description will allow the child to determine the subject matter depicted, such as a man seated on a box.
Questions: How do all of the parts fit together? Once the pieces are together the student may be asked what does this piece represent? At this point one is only looking for a simplistic description, such as a man seated on a box.

For younger and older students this part of the task can be approached through a game or a puzzle, where the pieces are given to each child. The child must describe verbally or in writing what he or she has and then the

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puzzle is put together according to the description.

Formal analysis:

T he formal analysis entails a detailed inventory of subject matter with descriptors such as round eyes, using as many adjectives as possible. This could be made into a game that every time something is described it must be preceded by an adjective. The use of the adjective moves the student into the formal analaysis because he/she is dealing with sensory properties and eventual principles of art as they relate to the sensory.

Questions: What do you see in the work of art, shapes, colors, patterns etc? What do you notice about this work of art, is it symetrical, is there a focal point, how do the eyes move around the piece?

II. Comparison: (two examples and two nonexamples)

The students are asked to describe the differences and similarities. They are asked to look for patterns in one group of images and then in the other group. The examples and nonexamples should be strikingly different. The purpose of this stage is to help the student identify characteristics that are particular to the piece under study.

Question: What elements are repeated over and over again to form a pattern in the execution of this piece?

III. Definition:

The purpose of this step is to allow the students to formulate a definition of the stylistic characteristics of the piece under study. They are asked to identify, through this comparaison, conventions used by the people in this unknown culture, and consequently isolate those conventions that may be stylistic in nature. It must be understood that conventions do not explain the stylistic phenomena, they only perpetuate it.

Question: What are the stylistic characteristics of the work of art?

IV. Classification:

This stage can be described as the application stage, where the student is asked to classify multiple examples of works, those that are examples and those that are not.

Question: Which ones represent the Kuba figure?

INQUIRY MODEL FOR ANALYSIS OF IMAGE

(based on intergrative model)

I. Observation:

Students go through a preliminary description of piece under study. This description would entail an inventory of such things as decorative motifs, any icons or things visible on the piece or attached to the piece. **Questions**: List or name the things (icons) you see attached to the piece? What is he holding, etc? Doscribe the images or icons included in this image.

II. Comparison:

In addition to identifying the things (icons) on the piece, students are asked to compare several works of art bearing similar icons characteristics.

Questions: What are the similarities between these two piece? Name the things, icons, that could be symbolic in each? (symboles are a very important part of the lives of 3rd and 4th graders)

This information may be charted on a matrix so that the students can see the similarities and difference. The matrix provides the guide for the objectives of the exercise

III. Analysis:

The analysis stage allows the students to enter into a discussion of the icons that may be symbolic. At this stage the student is asked to explain why the two (example and nonexample are similar. The analysis entails a preliminary identification of the subject matter based on the icons present in the piece. The conclusions should be based on reason, logic, basic knowledge and common sense. The student is asked to find conventional meanings of the symbols.

Questions: What do these icons means? What do they symbolize?

IV. Generalization:

During the generalization phase the students are asked to draw conclusions about the provenance and function of the work of art based on their (primary analysis) interpretations of the icons found on the figure.

(on a primary level for African art the provenance and attribution would be one and the same) In order to do this they must use the comparative comparative analysis information. If possible the date may be determined at this stage. Kleinbauer explains how the art historian uses different visual clues to determine questions of connoisseurship. The objective of this phase is to try and identify who, where, possibly when and the function/use of the piece under study. In short the student is formulating an hypothesis about the function and meaning of the piece. **Questions**: Where might this piece be from based on the visual clues and the stylistic and iconographic analysis? What could it represent (secondary representation)? How does it function?

The students are asked to summarize information about the piece. The summary should reflect the objectives of the lesson.
Question: If you could define this piece of art work, how would you define it. If you could summarize the information about this work of art, how would you summarize it?

INQUIRY MODEL FOR SYNTHETIC INTERPRETATION (ICONOLOGY)

(based on an inquiry information processing model)

I. The Problem:

The objective of this section is to have the students search for a deeper meaning of the work of art, a meaning that goes beyond the visual and entails information about the social/cultural context. The problem is formulated by the previous lessons.

Question: Why would a people make such a figure?

II. Hypothesis generation:

The student is asked to speculate on the possible reason for the creation of this work of art. The hypothesises are written on the board or on a chart.

Question: Give some reasons why you think these pieces may have been made?

III. Pre-iconological study:

It is at this stage that the student is asked to gather data about the culture and the people. For grades 5 through 12 the students may be asked to recall general knowledge of the beliefs, religionS and values of the culture they have described earlier. If for example they have identified the piece of art work as being from Africa, they may be asked questions concerning the beliefs, religions and values of the traditional African society. **Questions**: What do these people believe, what are their attitudes to some of the things you have just described? This is a means of verifying the primary interpretation they have given the icons and the function of the work of art. It also allows the student to justify and understand the presents of visual elements by understand the society.

IV. Iconological analysis:

This level allows for a re-assement of identification and meaning and thus represents a secondary intrepretation or reinterpretation of the icons to determine if the composition and iconographical features are evidence of 'something else."

Question: After consulting factual writings concerning the culture from

which the work stemmed, how would you alter your explanation or interpretation of the icon, and consequently of the piece.?

VII. Generalization:

From the information gathered from the iconological analysis the student is ready to formulate a generalization about the work of art.
Questions: Based on the information you have gathered, what conclusion could you draw about this piece? What conclusions can you draw about the secondary function and meaning of the piece?